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SPEECH OF
HON. Adriano Espaillat
OF New York
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Mr/s Speaker, I rise today to recognize Black History Month, also known as African American History Month during this month of February.

This is an opportunity to celebrate the countless contributions that African Americans have made to our great nation throughout its history. First recognized in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, Black History Month allows us to reflect on the collective strength that diversity continues to bring to our great nation today and the many days to come.

New York's thirteenth congressional district has a rich history that celebrates the contributions of African Americans to New York City, and the legacy of African American history in the United States. The Apollo Theater, opened in 1914, introduced the world to the transcendent voice and talent of Ella Fitzgerald, James Brown, and Lauryn Hill.

The Audubon Ballroom where the late Malcolm X (Malcolm el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz) was assassinated now stands in memoriam to his legacy and is also a venue for community organizing.

Even after his passing, in his name the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center has become a landmark for my constituents and visitors alike seeking reflection and enrichment.

Known to locals and across the country, Harlem's famous Sylvia's Restaurant founded by Sylvia Woods – the Queen of Soulfood – for 55 years stands proudly as a window to the rich culinary history of African Americans throughout the country. These institutions are cultural landmarks that help tell the story of the African American experience that runs throughout communities across the land.

During this month of reflection, as a representative of New York's 13th district, it is incumbent on me to highlight and celebrate the history of my predecessors. That history begins with the Honorable Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Congressman Powell was the first African-American to represent any district of New York in the U.S. Congress.

First elected in 1944, Congressman Powell served the Harlem community for more than two decades during which he worked tirelessly to raise the minimum wage, supported education and training for the hearing impaired, bolstered vocational training and endeavored to provide continued aid to elementary and secondary schools and public libraries.

His presence as an African-American in the U.S. House of Representatives was not just poignant for symbolisms' sake. In 1951, Congressman Powell rose to become the Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor. For his efforts, President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966 [wrote that Congressman Powell's record](#), "represents the successful reporting of 49 pieces of bed-rock legislation. And the passage of every one of these bills attests to your ability to get things done."

President Johnson continued "Even now, these laws which you so effectively guided through the House are finding abundant reward in the lives of our people." Most striking was his affirmation that "only with progressive leadership could so much have been accomplished by one committee in so short a time. I speak for millions of Americans who benefit from these laws when I say that I am truly grateful."

Congressman Powell's example and work to build Harlem (formerly New York's 22nd district) and provide opportunities for the African American community remain enshrined today. Most well-known is Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard running through Harlem and the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building in Harlem. While these share his name, his contributions reached beyond Harlem. Congressman Powell successfully coordinated the merger of Freedman's Hospital locally in Washington, D.C. with Howard University. Howard University has the largest concentration of black faculty and student scholars in the country and its College of Medicine stands today as a proud institution whose legacy contributing to African American society will continue to stand the test of time.

To my new colleagues, the Honorable Charles B. Rangel is no stranger to any of you. He has represented Harlem for almost 50 years beginning in the New York State Legislature and then in the U.S. House of Representatives. In this chamber, Congressman Rangel was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. For over 40 years, this esteemed organization has served to "[promote the public welfare through legislation designed to meet the needs of millions of neglected citizens.](#)" Where Congressman Powell rose to chair the House Committee on Education and Labor, Congressman Rangel in his own right rose among his peers to chair the House Committee on Ways and Means; where his chairmanship represents the "[most powerful gavel ever held by an African American in Congress.](#)"

Congressman Rangel's place in African American history transcends Harlem and New York City. In 1965 Congressman Rangel joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the historical march from Selma, AL to Montgomery, AL to advance equal civil rights for African Americans. The poignancy of this grand action over those five days guided a career advocating for non-

discrimination, developing urban neighborhoods and protecting veterans like himself from disfranchisement.

Mr/s Speaker, I am honored to have been given the opportunity share with my colleagues the virtues of African American Heritage Month and time to celebrate the contributions of African Americans in New York's 13th Congressional District. Thank you for this time.